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Changing Canadian family



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The Changing Canadian Family

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Political and Social Affairs Division

December 1986



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION.....	1
FAMILY TRENDS.....	1
A. Demographic Changes.....	1
1. Birthrates.....	1
2. Increased Life Expectancies.....	3
3. Marriage Rates.....	3
4. Childlessness.....	5
5. Implications of Demographic Changes.....	5
B. The Two-Income Family.....	6
1. Child Care.....	6
2. Home Care.....	8
C. Separation and Divorce.....	9
1. Divorce Rates.....	9
2. Implications of Divorce Rates.....	11
3. The Feminization of Poverty.....	12
D. Apparent Rise in Family Violence.....	13
1. Sexual Abuse of Children.....	14
2. Implications for Policy.....	14
E. Equality Issues.....	15
1. Equality Within the Home.....	15
2. Modifying the Work Environment.....	17
CONCLUSION.....	18
REFERENCES.....	20

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THE CHANGING CANADIAN FAMILY

INTRODUCTION

In the past 20 years, the institution of the family has undergone profound changes. Some of these have been precipitated by demographic trends, such as falling birthrates, rising life expectancies, and the completion of childbearing at an earlier age. Others have coincided with trends in labour market demands such as the expansion of the service sector, the widespread entrance of married women into the workforce and the consequent need for paid childcare. The causes of other trends, such as the apparent rise in family violence, are more difficult to pinpoint but are nevertheless important for policymakers. This paper will examine several trends in Canadian family structure and life, and discuss some policy implications of each.

FAMILY TRENDS

A. Demographic Changes

1. Birthrates

Throughout this century the birthrate has gradually been declining, especially since the 1960s, with new birth control technology, the entrance of large numbers of women into higher education and the labour force, and a more expansive role for women. While one hundred years ago there were about 34 births per 1,000 population in Canada, this figure had fallen to 15.0 by 1984.(1)

(1) Statistics Canada, Births and Deaths 1984, Cat. 84-204, Ottawa, March 1986, p. 2.

Falling birthrates have been considered by some policymakers as dangerous to a society such as Canada, with a relatively low population. In Quebec, concern has been expressed about declining birthrates because of a fear that Francophones will become an even smaller minority in the Canadian population. Historically, immigrants residing in Quebec have not adopted the French language as often as expected and have sometimes moved on to English Canada or the United States. Consequently, maintaining the birthrate has been particularly important in Quebec. From being one of the highest birthrates in the western world during the last century, Quebec's rate fell to 13.4 per 1,000 population in 1984.(2) Recently, there has been considerable discussion about the need for a family policy and more specifically, the need to raise the birthrate above the replacement level.

Several eastern European countries have attempted to induce families to procreate through special family allowances, generous maternity leaves and benefits and taxation policies. These attempted inducements have generally been unsuccessful because decisions to reproduce depend on many factors, including the economic climate, employment opportunities, educational plans, opportunities to combine family and work life, available accommodation, prevailing attitudes about women's role and the desirability of family life. In other words, the inducements have typically been insufficient to counter the reasons for reduced family size.

In the Northwest Territories, on the other hand, the high birthrate has caused concern because of the number of families requiring financial assistance and because of the association of high birthrates with infant mortality and economic underdevelopment. In 1984, there were 29.2 births per 1,000 in the Northwest Territories compared to the national average of 15.0. This is similar to the birthrate in the Caribbean.(3)

Governments have also had limited success in encouraging their citizens to curb family size, especially in less developed countries with high infant mortality rates and widespread poverty. Birth rates,

(2) Ibid.

(3) United Nations, Demographic Yearbook 1983, New York, 1985, p. 143.

however, generally fall with urbanization, industrialization and the entrance of married women into the labour force. China has been moderately successful with its enforced one-child policy, but the greatest resistance to it is in the less developed rural areas. Policies advocating birth control and smaller families are most successful among more prosperous urban families because children are not needed as a source of labour and are more costly to accommodate in urban conditions.

2. Increased Life Expectancies

In addition to the trend towards falling birthrates and smaller families in Western industrialized countries, life expectancies have increased especially for women. Since 1931, average life expectancy has increased 12.5 years for men and 17.5 years for women.(4) This has raised the average age of the population, creating a need for new policies and services for older people. But longer life spans also imply longer marriages or at least a longer time until "death us do part." Consequently, more marriages are ending in separation and divorce after 15 or 20 years than previously. Longer life spans also mean more time for families beyond the reproduction and childrearing years. Longer periods of retirement on reduced incomes have increased the numbers of the elderly poor and raised the necessity for public pensions. A longer period on pension has been a particular problem for women, who are less likely to have employer-sponsored pensions or even survival benefits from their husbands' private pensions, and therefore are more reliant on costly public pension plans.

3. Marriage Rates

Contrary to popular belief, in 1981 a larger proportion of Canadians had been married at some point in their lives than had been the case in 1881. Among women 45 to 49 years old, 88.7% were "ever-married" in 1881 and 94.2% in 1981.(5) Increased rates of marriage since the Second

(4) Statistics Canada, Population Projections for Canada, Provinces and Territories 1984-2006, Cat. 91-520, Ottawa, May 1985, p. 107.

(5) Ellen M. Gee, "The Life Course of Canadian Women: An Historical and Demographic Analysis," Social Indicators Research, Vol. 18, 1986, p. 263-283.

World War were largely the result of fewer family and societal restrictions on marriage, greater personal choice of partner, more mobility and opportunity to meet potential partners, and fewer financial and personal reasons to delay marriage. With some women earning their own money, more effective birth control techniques and greater independence for young people, marriage no longer automatically implied that a man must support a wife and children. Employed young people living on their own could actually reduce their living expenses by marrying or at least living as a couple.

Although the average age of first marriage fell from the postwar period until 1971, it has risen again since that date. The trend for older marriages was particularly noticeable from 1981 to 1985 when the median age at first marriage rose from 24.6 to 25.6 years for grooms and from 22.5 to 23.7 for brides.(6) The median age for brides had not been so high since before World War II.

Not only is single living becoming more prevalent for those under 25, but couples often live together before legal marriage. Some have referred to this latter trend as a "new courtship pattern." In 1961 about 80% of women married by the age of 25. By 1981 only 59% had been married by that age. For men, the comparable figures dropped from 57% to 40%.(7) Remaining unmarried, however, no longer implies sexual inexperience.

The separation of marriage and reproduction has presented a number of complex legal problems which have not yet been resolved. The rights of biological and legal fathers, for example, have been complicated by increasing rates of "common-law" or "de facto" marriages, surrogate motherhood, artificial insemination and motherhood outside an established relationship. Increasing numbers of single mothers have caused provincial social assistance departments to define carefully their eligibility rules for benefits. Some provinces still assume that the presence of a man in

(6) Roderic Beaujot, "Dwindling Families," Policy Options September 1986, p. 3-7; Statistics Canada, Marriages and Divorces 1985, Cat. 84-205, September 1986, p. 2.

(7) Ibid.

the house means that the single mother no longer needs family assistance because the man ought to support her children. But assumptions such as these can no longer be made without threats of court challenges based on the Charter of Rights, a fact which prompted the Ontario government to change its social assistance regulations in September 1986.

4. Childlessness

Although married women under 35 appear to have relatively high rates of childlessness, long-term trends indicate that childlessness was less prevalent in 1981 than in 1941.(8) The 13% of childless ever-married women in 1941 probably included many who wanted children but could not reproduce because either they or their husbands experienced physiological problems. Involuntarily childlessness can now often be remedied through new medical techniques. Consequently, only 7% of ever-married women were childless in 1981.

5. Implications of Demographic Changes

Later marriage, smaller families and increased acceptance of single living have had consequences for government policy. Lower birth rates would have led to dramatic reductions in the cost of federal and provincial benefits had these not been indexed or periodically adjusted to the rising cost of living. Smaller families have enabled mothers to enter or remain in the labour force during prime childbearing years. On the other hand, we could also argue that increased economic needs for two incomes in the family have reduced women's motivation and ability to maintain large families. In a society such as ours which places the onus of housework and childcare mainly on individual women, it is difficult for them to combine the responsibilities of a large family with paid work. Women in industrialized countries have responded to the "double day" of both paid employment and unpaid domestic work by having fewer or no children. An increase in living together outside legal marriage has led to greater legal protection for individuals rather than family units and more social acceptance of non-marital sex.

(8) Gee (1986)

B. The Two-Income Family

In August 1986, 63% of mothers of children under 16 worked for pay -- about three-quarters of them full-time.(9) The widespread entrance of mothers and married women into the labour force resulted mainly from economic considerations. After World War II, the expansion of the service sector of the labour force increased the need for labour. Higher education, smaller families, advances in birth control, the removal of legal restrictions, the rising rate of marriage dissolution, changing attitudes and rising costs all encouraged women into paid work. As women became more visible in public life, they pushed for expanded opportunities and equal remuneration.

Some researchers have seen women's increased labour force participation as one of the most important social changes of this century, influencing many other aspects of life. Having one's own earnings, for example, can augment personal confidence, decision-making power and opportunities for personal expansion. The additional family income raises the standard of living for two-income families but also increases income inequality between one-income and two-income families. Separation and divorce become more viable options when both spouses have their own income. Two-income families also create the need for new services, such as convenience foods, home cleaning companies and public child care facilities.

1. Child Care

Under the present system, childcare for low-income or one-parent families is cost-shared between the provinces and the federal government under the Canada Assistance Plan. For these families, subsidized spaces are set aside, generally in non-profit government-regulated daycare centres or licensed homes. Parents of children from two-parent families, or those above the poverty line, however, must pay the full cost if they require non-family childcare. In 1984, this ranged from about \$3,000 to

(9) Statistics Canada, The Labour Force, Cat. 71-001, Ottawa, September 1986, p. 36.

\$5,000 per child,(10) depending on the province. The federal government also offers a Child Care Expenses Deduction from income tax, which amounts to a maximum of \$2,000 a year per child, up to \$8,000 per family. Although this could be a valuable deduction, especially for families with higher taxable incomes, it is not used by a substantial minority of parents who are unable to obtain receipts from caretakers working informally within the "underground economy." The federal government further provides childcare allowances for trainees in Canada Employment and Immigration programs.

Despite federal and provincial government involvement in childcare, the many provincial variations create a system which lacks unity, consistency and sometimes quality. Many non-profit daycare centres have long waiting lists. Others are considered by parents to provide inadequate care. Consequently, most parents hire their own babysitters or use relatives to assist with childcare. The quality of care received by most children of working parents can be monitored only by those parents, who often do not have the opportunity or time to investigate conditions fully. Because parents often cannot find alternative care, they must accept whatever is available. A number of consumer groups have formed around this issue, including the Canadian Daycare Advocacy Association and daycare committees within large unions, calling for the federal government to take a role in funding childcare similar to its role in funding post-secondary education or Medicare.

Through the lobby efforts of the Canadian Daycare Advocacy Association and other groups, the previous Liberal government was encouraged to appoint a ministerial task force on childcare.(11) Chaired by Dr. Katie Cooke, the Childcare Task Force completed a comprehensive review of childcare and parental leave in Canada and produced its report in April 1986. The report contained 53 recommendations. The major one advocated a new childcare system, involving federal and provincial cost-sharing, government licensing and/or regulating, and public accountability, and

(10) Report of the Task Force on Child Care, Chaired by Dr. Katie Cooke, Status of Women Canada, Ottawa, March 1986, p. 195.

(11) Maureen Morrison, "Daycare: 20th Century Talk, 19th Century Action," Canadian Dimension, Vol. 20, September-October 1986, p. 19-21.

a wide range of services for pre-school and school-aged children. This publicly-funded system was estimated would cost \$11.3 billion by 2001,(12) which was considered by some journalists and politicians to be outrageously expensive in the present economic climate. The Mulroney government decided to study the issue further and established a Special Parliamentary Committee on Childcare, which is expected to report late in 1986. In addition, the Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology investigated actual and potential changes to family benefits during 1985-86.

Whether or not governments should be more involved in childcare remains a contentious issue. Some lobby groups, such as Real Women of Canada, have argued for more taxation support for the one-income family or even wages for homemakers to enable women to look after their own children. But the amount of these benefits would be much less than the income from working in the labour force, and many families could not afford to lose one income.

2. Home Care

Childcare is not the only problem facing families with working parents. Health care workers and policymakers are beginning to turn to home care as an alternative to the high costs of institutionalization for the old and ill. Historically, daughters have been the main caretakers for their elderly parents and mothers for disabled children. This traditional source of unpaid family labour is once again being examined as one way to reduce health and chronic care costs. But adequate attention is not always given to the fact that many middle-aged women are now in the labour force. Without some remuneration and community assistance, these will be unable to care for their elderly parents because of their own work responsibilities. Heavy reliance on voluntary labour is no longer feasible because of the two-income family. Health care resources could still be saved, however, by paying family members or private individuals to care for chronically ill patients in their own homes. But the quality of care would be more difficult to monitor.

(12) Kathleen G. Ross, "Parents' Choice," Policy Options, Vol. 7, September 1986, p. 31.

The two-income family will also force service people to adjust their delivery and service call times to evenings and weekends. Utility companies, for example, can no longer assume that someone is home during the day to let them in to read a meter. These companies are now encouraging people to read their own meters and telephone the readings in to an answering machine. Other retail businesses and financial organizations are extending their hours to evenings and weekends to accommodate two-income families. This in turn extends the working hours of other segments of the labour force, however, and violates some people's notion that there should be a day of rest or times when family members can be together.

C. Separation and Divorce

Divorce rates have been rising throughout the 20th century, but increased sharply in Canada after 1968 when the grounds for divorce were liberalized. Before 1925, legal divorce was very restricted, expensive and easier for men than for women to obtain. A new ground for divorce was created in 1968 called "marriage breakdown," which was strictly defined but made divorce more accessible. With the 1986 legal changes, "marriage breakdown" has been more liberally defined and the waiting period from application to final decree has been reduced.

1. Divorce Rates

Numerous factors have pushed up divorce rates in developed societies. With industrialization, many young people moved away from family restrictions and raised their expectations of personal fulfilment. Growing individualism discouraged the view of marriage as sacred or related primarily to family lineage, obligation or procreation. People began to feel that they had a right to personal happiness, fair treatment and love in marriage. The entrance of married women into the labour force allowed them to support themselves outside marriage, gave them increased opportunities to meet new people and to compare their personal situations. Improved birth control technology made it possible to separate sex and marriage, permitting more discreet extra-marital relations for both men and women.

Discussion of the extent of family dissolution is usually based on divorce rates compiled by Statistics Canada, but sociologists estimate that the rate of marital separation may be as high as the divorce rate. Since no official record of separations exists, because only some people enter into legal agreements, marriage dissolution in any year could be twice as high as government figures imply.

As the table below shows, the divorce rate, according to Statistics Canada, rose almost consistently from 1921 to 1982. Since 1983, however, the rate has declined. With high unemployment and rising costs of lawyers, more people may be separating without legal divorce. Anticipation of changes in the divorce law may have encouraged people to postpone their divorce. Alternatively, lower divorce rates may merely be a function of demographic change -- fewer married people in the population of the age when divorce is most common (now about 36 years).

Divorce Rates in Canada
(Per 100,000 Population)

1921	6.4
1931	6.8
1941	21.4
1951	37.6
1961	36.0
1968	54.8
1969	124.2
1970	139.8
1971	137.6
1976	235.8
1981	178.0
1982	285.9
1983	275.5
1984	259.4
1985	244.4

Sources: Statistics Canada, Marriages and Divorces 1985 Cat. 84-205, September 1986; Maureen Baker and Anne-Marie Ambert, "Marriage Dissolution: Structural and Ideological Changes," in The Family: Changing Trends in Canada, edited by M. Baker, McGraw-Hill Ryerson, Toronto, 1984, p. 85.

Those concerned about the extent of marriage dissolution in the 1980s should keep in mind that the percentage of one-parent families was higher in 1931 than in 1981. In 1931, 13.6% of all families contained only one parent compared to 11.3% in 1981.(13) The percentage of one-parent families fell from 1931 to 1961 as life expectancy rose, and then began to rise again with the divorce rate. Though higher rates of one-parent families in the earlier part of this century generally resulted from death or desertion rather than legal divorce, the financial consequences were similar for women and children.(14)

Canada's divorce rate is moderate compared to that of other countries. While Canada had a rate of 336.7 divorces per 1,000 marriages in 1985, the comparable rate in Sweden was 555.6, in the United States 482.4, in Britain 426.1, in the USSR 333.8, in Belgium 286.6 and in Italy 42.6.(15)

2. Implications of Divorce Rates

An American study by Lenore Weitzman of Stanford University suggested that "no fault" divorce laws in California led to greater inequality between the sexes throughout the 1970s than before the legal changes. Since women usually receive custody of the children and when they work outside the home earn only about two-thirds of men's wages, and since men frequently default on their court-ordered child support payments, women became worse off after legislative "reform." Prior to these changes, women could have been awarded alimony and could have delayed the hearing until they negotiated a higher settlement. Weitzman found that while the standard of living of divorced men on average increased by 42% within one year of the court settlement, the standard of living of divorced women and

(13) Statistics Canada, Canada's Lone-Parent Families, Cat. 99-933, Ottawa, 1984.

(14) See Library of Parliament BP-126E, entitled "Social Support for One-Parent Families," May 1985.

(15) Statistics Canada, Marriages and Divorces 1985, Cat. 84-205, Ottawa, September 1986, p. 32.

their children declined by 73%.⁽¹⁶⁾ Weitzman argued that American laws are based on the false assumption of equality between the sexes.

Canadian feminists have made a similar argument, pointing out that the present procedures for enforcing support payments, which leave the onus on the financially dependent spouse (usually the woman) to take the other to court, are inadequate in most provinces. While Manitoba and Quebec have recently amended these laws, the new federal legislation (1986) has left the onus on women.

Expecting a woman who has been a housewife for 10 to 20 years to be self-supporting to the same extent as her husband is totally unrealistic, according to many feminist groups. Despite the fact that the law says that either parent can obtain custody, women usually retain the children but with a fraction of former family income. Some of these problems could be settled with greater use of joint custody, but this award requires some basic agreement between divorcing spouses and has not been favoured by the legal profession.

3. The Feminization of Poverty

The National Council of Welfare has pointed out in its recent reports that single mothers now form a large segment of the poor. Four in 10 families headed by women are poor compared to one in 10 led by men. Single mothers are over five times more likely to be poor than families with two parents. This has prompted some analysts to talk of the "feminization of poverty." The dramatic rise in the rates of separation and divorce have led to more female-led families over the last 15 years. Unattached older women and mothers with young children heading a one-parent family are most vulnerable to poverty. The more children in the family, the higher the chance that those children will live in poverty.⁽¹⁷⁾

Recent changes to the Child Tax Credit directed more family benefit money to the poorest families by reducing the Child Tax Exemption,

(16) Lenore J. Weitzman, The Divorce Revolution: The Unexpected Social and Economic Consequences for Women and Children in America, Free Press, New York, 1985.

(17) National Council of Welfare, Poverty on the Increase, Ottawa, March 1985, p. 7.

partially deindexing Family Allowance and raising the Child Tax Credit. The income level at which the maximum Child Tax Credit could be received was also reduced (from \$26,330 to \$23,500). But lobby groups argued that single mothers need more than the \$454 Child Tax Credit to raise their standard of living. The Equivalent to Married Exemption, by which a single parent can deduct one child at the same rate as a spouse (\$3,666 in 1986 instead of \$710 for a child under 18), is of great assistance to one-parent families, but those with higher taxable income always benefit more than poor people from any income tax deductions.

Lobby groups also argued that the Family Allowance should not be partially deindexed because it may be the only money to which a mother has access for the children if the family income is earned by her husband. Basing the needs of children on family income may be a poor way of ensuring that needy children are well clothed and fed. For this reason, some analysts have suggested more direct ways of allocating money to children rather than channelling it through parents. One such suggestion is the comprehensive system of child care recommended by the Cooke Task Force, in which child care would be paid for by taxes just like the public school system.

D. Apparent Rise in Family Violence

Throughout North America, the number of child abuse and wife battering cases reported to the authorities has grown dramatically. Some researchers have tried to relate this apparent increase in family violence to unemployment, economic recession, alcohol and drug abuse, divorce and working mothers. A large part of the increase, however, has been caused by new laws requiring professionals and ordinary citizens to report such behaviour.

Attitudes which expected victims to tolerate abuse have changed, and social service workers are becoming more sympathetic and helpful to victims. People charged with family violence are now more likely to be arrested and convicted than in the past, when police and the courts saw such violence as a private family matter. In turn, increased enforcement

of the law encourages reporting. These factors have increased the visibility of family violence but whether there is actually more abuse than before remains under dispute.

1. Sexual Abuse of Children

Although physical abuse remains an issue, recent attention has focused on the sexual abuse of children. The Badgley Report in 1984 concluded through a variety of research techniques that the proportion of adults who had been victims of "unwanted sexual acts" as children was much higher than previously acknowledged. The report noted that sexual abuse generally occurs during the daytime, in the victim's or a friend's home and is likely to be carried out by a male relative or family friend. While girls are more vulnerable to abuse than boys, a sizeable minority of young boys are sexually abused. Recently, school and church leaders have become concerned about sexual abuse by teachers, youth workers and priests, and are looking for ways to detect potential abusers before an incident occurs and to deal with those accused of abuse.

Because provincial legislation covers many family and child protection issues, ways of responding to family violence and regulations and procedures for reporting vary across the country. Money granted to social services, including transition houses, counselling and family courts, fluctuates by province. There is lack of intervention in known child abuse situations because of insufficient staff and the sheer number of cases reported.

2. Implications for Policy

Shortage of temporary and low-income housing prevents many wives and children from leaving an abusive home. Others continue to tolerate abuse because of a feeling that it may somehow be their own fault, or because of fear of reprisal or lack of knowledge about where to turn for assistance. Although governments at all levels have voiced their concern about family violence, more money needs to be allocated to transitional housing, hiring social workers to investigate new cases, and follow-up therapy and counselling for the entire family. But in the present economic climate new resources are difficult to find.

The federal government has not established a central child abuse registry, as recommended by several reports including Badgley's, but rather has appointed a coordinator of child abuse to work through the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence located in Health and Welfare. Federal legislation was introduced in June and October 1986 to give children's evidence in child abuse cases more credence.(18)

E. Equality Issues

Despite Canada's Charter of Rights, which emphasizes the equality of all, regardless of sex, inequalities difficult to counter with legislation still exist in the workplace and home. The new Employment Equity Act, for example, covers only a small portion of employees under federal jurisdiction and provides no penalties for discriminating against women, disabled people, native people or visible minorities. The only penalties are for not reporting the numbers hired and promoted. The onus is placed on employees to complain through the provincial and Canadian Human Rights Commissions. Although only time will tell how effective this legislation really is, many lobby groups have argued that it has no "teeth."

1. Equality Within the Home

For many years, feminists have stated that one of the keys to equality of opportunity on the job relates to equality within the home. If women remain responsible for childcare and housework within the family, their ability and motivation to get ahead in their paid employment will be affected. In the past two decades, labour force expectations have largely forced women workers to adapt to a working environment designed by men for men. Although maternity leave and benefits have been granted to some workers, employers have been encouraged to treat male and female employees alike. Significant changes have not been made, however, in the social

(18) For more details on child abuse, see Maureen Baker, Current Issue Review 82-17E, Research Branch, Library of Parliament.

expectations that mothers will be responsible for childcare decisions and care, and that wives will be responsible for housework and family matters. Many women in high level jobs are still expected to hire and supervise babysitters, stay home with sick children, wash and iron clothes, vacuum, dust and maintain contact with relatives and friends. While husbands are generally expected to look after the car and external aspects of the home, these duties tend to be sporadic rather than routine, and the timing less critical.

Outside the workplace, few attempts have been made to equalize the position of husbands and wives except upon divorce. If a working husband does not adequately provide for his dependent wife and children, there is little recourse for the wife. Only upon divorce does this become a legal issue, yet in most provinces the onus is placed on the ex-wife to seek court-awarded support money. The 1986 federal legislation dealing with support and custody does not alter the fact that the custodial parent must initiate legal action, except where provincial legislation has already put the onus on the government. In Manitoba, for example, the custodial parent automatically receives a support cheque from the province and the government in turn collects the money from the non-custodial parent.

More flexible work hours and generous leave provisions may assist parents to combine their work and family lives, but as long as child care is unavailable or expensive, some parents (and especially mothers) will not be free to accept work or to be able to concentrate on their present job. Numerous studies have indicated that although more than half of married women work for pay outside the home, husbands have not taken up the slack by sharing domestic responsibilities. The "double day" in women's work lives cuts into their time for sleep and leisure, and discourages additional responsibility or longer hours at the paid job.(19)

(19) Susan Clark and Andrew Harvey, "The Sexual Division of Labour: The Use of Time," Atlantis 2(1), 1976, p. 44-66; Martin Meissner et al., "No Exit for Wives: Sexual Division of Labour and the Cumulation of Household Demands," Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology, Vol. 12 (Part I), 1975, p. 424-439; Bonnie Fox (ed.), Hidden in the Household, Women's Press, Toronto, 1980; Bettina Berch, The Endless Day: The Political Economy of Women and Work, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc., New York, 1982.

It also encourages women to opt for part-time work, usually with lower hourly wages and fewer employment benefits. While 26% of women work part-time, only 8% of men do.(20)

While some socialist countries, such as Cuba, have attempted to legislate shared domestic work, this legislation has been virtually unenforceable. Housework and childcare have been stigmatized as "women's work," and men have been reluctant to take them on because they are unpaid, routine and often conflict with paid work responsibilities.

2. Modifying the Work Environment

Perhaps equality within the home will gradually evolve through new role models and changing attitudes. But employers could assist their employees to combine work and home life through more flexible hours and conditions, work or job-sharing, leave for family emergencies and on-site child care or employer-sponsored child care vouchers as part of the benefit package. Some unions have fought hard for more employer assistance with family/work conflicts but until recently unions have tended to focus on the needs and concerns of the majority of their members, mainly full-time skilled males.(21)

Some of the changes to promote equality should also originate from federal and provincial legislation. Part-time work, for example, is not always covered by the same labour legislation as full-time work, and consequently receives lower wages and fewer employment benefits. Married women have often accepted part-time work in order to combine childrearing with paid employment. While some employers and unions have initiated work and job-sharing, reduced working hours, sabbaticals and flexible hours, most of these changes have been in response to threatened lay-offs rather than to assist employees to facilitate work/family

(20) Statistics Canada, The Labour Force, Cat. 71-001, Ottawa, September 1986, p. 56.

(21) Maureen Baker and Mary-Anne Robeson, "Trade Union Reactions to Women Workers and Their Concerns," in Work in the Canadian Context (2nd ed.), edited by K. Lundy and B. Warne, Butterworths, Toronto, 1986.

problems. Legislation could provide much more than minimal protection, and could actually promote innovations.

Equality within and outside the home are interrelated. If wives and mothers retain the responsibility for most housework and childcare, their energy and motivation to work overtime or take on extra responsibility at work will probably be limited. But present concepts of equality in the workplace entail placing an equal monetary value on work of similar experience and skill level, regardless of which sex does it, as well as trying to encourage women into work patterns and occupations traditionally typical of men. The workplace must also be more responsive to the demands of the personal lives of employees, regardless of their sex, and this may provide some motivation for husbands to share equally the responsibilities and pleasures of family life.

CONCLUSION

Although the younger generation is postponing marriage, living together without legal ties and creating fewer permanent relationships, there is no evidence that marriage is a dying institution. Young people are first entering marriage at older ages, but they still are marrying for similar reasons as a few decades ago -- for emotional security, to raise children, for companionship, regular sex, or financial stability, or to attain adult status, or to share their lives with someone they love. Despite high divorce rates, remarriage rates are also high. In 1985, for example, 17% of marriages were remarriages for at least one of the partners.(22)

Among those who marry, the vast majority produce children. Although families are smaller, the desire to reproduce remains strong. In 1981, only 7.2% of ever-married women over childbearing age were childless compared to 15.5% in 1961.(23) While voluntary childlessness appears to

(22) Statistics Canada, Marriages and Divorces 1985, Cat. 84-205, September 1986.

(23) Gee (1986).

be much more prevalent among women under 35, some of these may reproduce closer to the end of their fertile period.

The prevalence of couples living together outside marriage has precipitated legal changes to make de facto and legal marriage more similar. The differences between the rights of legal and non-legal partners and their children may have in some ways lowered the motivation to marry legally. In fact, in some situations, an unmarried couple living together may be better off financially than if they married. This is the case for two employed single parents who live together as husband and wife. Each can claim income tax Equivalent to Married Exemption for one child as well as Child Care Expenses Deduction. If they married, they would lose the EME and only one partner could claim Child Care Expenses.

Rather than talking about "the family," it may be more realistic to acknowledge the variety of family patterns in Canada. Variety is even more prevalent in this country than in other nations because of the multicultural nature of our society. A sizeable minority of Canadians live in three generation families -- with parents, children and grandparents -- or in one-parent families, even though our romanticized image of the "typical" family still contains two parents and two children. And most families now have two earners. Any attempt to create a national family policy must not disadvantage any particular family structure. Income tax policies, for example, cannot favour the two-income family over the one-income family without political repercussions. People have strong feelings about personal and family life and it is difficult or impossible to legislate conformity to a particular family structure. For this reason, attempts to create family policy have often been so contentious that they were abandoned. As a result, family benefits have been developed over the years in a rather ad hoc way and their major goals have not always been consistent.

In any revision of family benefits, we need to be aware of the variety in family structure as well as the historical trends in family life. Even if we are not happy about these trends, we must acknowledge their reality. Only then can we create benefits which truly assist all family types rather than basing our policies on a form of family life more typical of some time in the vague and romanticized past.

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